

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend claims 20 and 45 as shown below, and add new claims 49-57, in which deleted terms are shown with strikethrough and added terms are shown with underscoring. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Claims 1-13 (Canceled).

Claim 14. (Withdrawn) Apparatus for forming a protective film on a surface of a ~~large-~~sized product finished with a sprayed coating, by applying a strippable paint to a surface of said sprayed coating, said apparatus comprising:

an application booth for applying said strippable paint to said product;  
a preliminary drying furnace for preliminarily drying the strippable paint applied to product; and  
a non-preliminary drying furnace for non-preliminarily drying said product already preliminarily dried.

Claim 15. (Withdrawn) The machine of claim 14, wherein said preliminary drying furnace is an infrared furnace.

Claim 16. (Withdrawn) The machine of claim 14, wherein said non-preliminary drying furnace is a hot air furnace.

Claims 17-18 (Canceled).

Claim 19. (Withdrawn) Apparatus for forming a protective film on a surface of a large-sized product finished with a sprayed coating by applying a strippable paint to a surface of said sprayed coating, said apparatus comprising:

a pretreatment means including a washing device for washing away contaminations such as dust, dirty water, and rainwater from said surface of said coating of said product and a dehydrating device;

an application booth for applying strippable paint to the product, said application booth being located contiguous with said pretreatment means;

a preliminary drying furnace for preliminarily drying the strippable paint applied to said product; and

a non-preliminary drying furnace for non-preliminarily drying said product already preliminarily dried.

Claim 20. (Currently Amended) In a vehicle manufacturing method involving press-forming panel parts from a sheet metal and welding the panel parts together to form an automobile body, the method comprising the steps of:

painting the automobile body so that the automobile is paint-finished;

assembling an engine and functional parts into the paint-finished automobile body to thereby produce an assembled automobile; and

after the automobile is completely manufactured, performing a final inspection of  
~~inspecting~~ the assembled automobile,

wherein the method further includes, between the painting and the assembling steps, coating a strippable paint on an exterior painted surface of the paint-finished automobile body to

thereby form a protective film on the painted surface, and

at least the assembling step [[is]] and the final inspection step are carried out while the protective film of the strippable paint remains coated on the painted surface of the paint-finished automobile body.

Claims 21-26 (Canceled).

Claim 27. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, further including the steps of:  
preliminarily drying said coated strippable paint using a first drying means; and  
non-preliminarily drying the preliminarily dried, strippable paint using a second drying means.

Claims 28-29 (Canceled).

Claim 30. (Previously presented) The method of claim 27, wherein said step of  
preliminarily drying said strippable paint uses infrared radiation from said first drying means and  
said step of non-preliminarily drying said strippable paint uses hot air from said second drying means.

Claim 31. (Previously presented) The method of claim 27, further including the step of  
stabilizing the strippable paint after it is coated on said product and prior to said preliminary  
drying step.

Claim 32. (Original) The method of claim 31, wherein said stabilizing step is performed at room temperature.

Claim 33. (Original) The method of claim 27, wherein said preliminary and non-preliminary drying steps are performed at elevated temperatures.

Claims 34-35 (Canceled).

Claim 36. (Withdrawn) Apparatus for forming a protective film on a large paint-finished product according to claim 19, further including an assembly booth for mounting an engine and functional parts to the paint-finished product after the strippable paint coating step.

Claim 37. (Original) The method of claim 32, wherein said preliminary and non-preliminary drying steps are performed at elevated temperatures.

Claim 38. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, wherein said strippable paint is water based.

Claim 39. (Previously presented) The method of claim 27, wherein said strippable paint is water based.

Claim 40. (Previously amended) The method of claim 31, wherein said stabilizing step is performed at an ambient temperature of 15-30 °C and an ambient humidity of 50-80%.

Claim 41. (Previously presented) The method of claim 27, wherein said preliminary drying step promotes drying of said coated strippable paint from inside the coating, and said non-preliminary drying step dries the preliminarily dried, coated strippable paint from outside the coating.

Claim 42. (Previously presented) The method of claim 30, wherein said preliminary drying step dries said coated strippable paint from inside the coating, and said non-preliminary drying step dries the preliminarily dried, coated strippable paint from outside the coating.

Claim 43. (Previously presented) The method of claim 31, wherein said strippable paint is water soluble and said stabilizing step is performed by allowing the automobile to stand for a sufficiently long time at an ambient temperature of 15–30 °C and an ambient humidity of 50–80% after application of the peelable paint before said preliminary drying step.

Claim 44. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, further comprising the steps of:

partially drying the strippable paint coated on the painted surface of the paint-finished automobile so as to promote drying of the strippable paint from inside thereof; and

then finally drying the automobile to uniformly dry the entire strippable paint coated on the painted surface of the paint-finished automobile.

Claim 45. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, further including the step of

shipping the manufactured vehicle after the ~~inspecting~~ final inspection step, wherein said ~~inspecting and shipping steps are~~ is also carried out while the protective film of the ~~strippable~~ paint remains coated on the assembled automobile body.

Claim 46. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, wherein said protective film formed in said strippable paint coating step has a sufficient thickness to protect said painted surface of the paint-finished automobile body against scratches during said assembling step.

Claim 47. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, wherein said strippable paint coating step involves painting said strippable paint on multiple surfaces of the paint-finished automobile body to thereby form a protective film on the painted surfaces.

Claim 48. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, wherein said strippable paint coating step involves painting said strippable paint on all exterior surfaces of the paint-finished automobile body to thereby form a protective film on the painted surfaces.

Claim 49. (New) A method of protecting a painted exterior surface of a vehicle, comprising the steps of:

- a) applying paint to a plurality of vehicle body components;
- b) drying the paint on the plurality of vehicle body components;
- c) applying a strippable protective coating over the dried paint on the plurality of vehicle body components, wherein the strippable protective coating is applied as a liquid;
- d) drying the strippable protective coating;

and

e) assembling the plurality of vehicle body components together with other vehicle components to form a vehicle;

wherein the strippable protective coating is applied to cover substantially all painted exterior surfaces of said vehicle, and wherein no additional paint is applied to the vehicle after the protective coating has been applied.

50. (New) The method of claim 49, wherein the paint is visible through the protective coating.

51. (New) The method of claim 50, further comprising a step of inspecting the finished assembled vehicle with the protective coating thereon.

52. (New) The method of claim 51, further comprising a step of shipping the finished inspected vehicle to a destination with the protective coating thereon.

53. (New) The method of claim 52, further comprising a step of removing the protective coating at the destination.

54. (New) A method of protecting a painted exterior surface of a vehicle, comprising the steps of:

- a) applying paint to a plurality of vehicle body components;
- b) drying the paint on the plurality of vehicle body components;

- c) applying a strippable protective coating over the dried paint on the plurality of vehicle body components, wherein the strippable protective coating is applied as a liquid;
- d) drying the strippable protective coating;
- e) assembling the plurality of vehicle body components together with other vehicle components to form a vehicle; and
- e) inspecting the finished assembled vehicle with the protective coating thereon, wherein the paint is visible through the protective coating, wherein no additional paint is applied to the vehicle after the protective coating has been applied.

55. (New) The method of claim 54, further comprising a step of shipping the finished inspected vehicle to a destination with the protective coating thereon.

56. (New) The method of claim 54, wherein the protective coating is applied to substantially all painted exterior surfaces of the vehicle.

57. (New) A method of protecting a painted exterior surface of a vehicle, comprising the steps of:

- a) applying paint to a plurality of vehicle body components;
- b) drying the paint on the plurality of vehicle body components;
- c) applying a strippable protective coating over the dried paint on the plurality of vehicle body components, wherein the strippable protective coating is applied as a liquid;
- d) drying the strippable protective coating;
- e) assembling the plurality of vehicle body components together with other vehicle components to form a vehicle;



- f) inspecting the finished assembled vehicle with the protective coating thereon; and
- g) shipping the finished inspected vehicle to a destination with the protective coating thereon;

wherein the paint is visible through the protective coating, wherein the strippable protective coating is applied to cover substantially all painted exterior surfaces of said vehicle, and wherein no additional paint is applied to the vehicle after the protective coating has been applied.